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Post, George Adams

Some things we don't do

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Some Things We Don't Do

Annual Address by

GEO. A. POST

President of the

RAILWAY BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

National organization of manufacturing, mercantile and engineering concerns which deal with steam railways, at the annual business meeting, Waldorf-Astoria, New York, Jan. 27, 1916

REQUESTS FOR COPIES

of this pamphlet will be welcome from all those desiring to place it in the hands of their representatives or friends. Copies furnished or sent direct to lists upon application to Frank W. Noxon, Secretary Railway Business Association, 30 Church Street, New York.

Some Things We Don't Do

ADDRESS BY

GEO. A. POST

President of the Railway Business Association, at its
Annual Business Meeting, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel
New York, Jan. 27, 1916

Published by resolution of the Association

Mr. 141, 1916 - B. B.
WE gather this morning in an atmosphere of eager anticipation. We shall have as our guest this evening the highest officer in the government. Amid our fervent pride and satisfaction on this important occasion it is fitting to remind ourselves of some of the circumstances which have gone before and which will shape our course in the immediate future.

Business organizations are now looked upon by political leaders in a new light. Both business and politics have developed along novel lines. Current thought on that subject was significantly expounded by President Wilson himself a year ago. He was addressing the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. Expressing warm approval of that body, he contrasted its activity with that of organizations which, as he said, "boost" localities or special interests. He declared: "The advantage about a Chamber of Commerce of the United States is that there is only one way to 'boost' the United States, and that is by seeing to it that conditions under which business is done throughout the whole country are the best possible conditions." The President was glad, he said, to participate in that meeting because the organization had that character.

Have Avoided "Boosting"

I venture to believe that a similar impression of the Railway Business

Association was in the President's mind on that day many weeks ago when we were bidden to hope for his acceptance of our invitation, subject only to exigencies of state. For the seven years of our existence as an association we have studiously refrained from advocating anything which would be in somebody's special interest and not in the general interest. Ours, to be sure, is a special field. Our purpose, we proclaim, is to improve governmental conditions affecting railways. Progress in that direction, we admit, means a strengthening of railway buying power and thereby we directly benefit. Nevertheless it is known of all men that we manufacturers have suggested to our neighbors only such action as they could fairly be asked to take as citizens and as business men. Whatever co-operation they have generously given us the event has found us looking them proudly in the eye, secure in the consciousness that we have not put over or tried to put over anything on anybody.

The Congressional Inquiry

Congress appears to be about undertaking the most comprehensive endeavor yet made toward the betterment of the governmental conditions under which railways operate. Our honored guest of this evening in an official communication to that body has proposed a general investigation

into the whole subject. A resolution is pending in the Senate, introduced by the Chairman of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, which would provide for such an inquiry. The Railway Business Association, we hope, will be permitted to co-operate. At the threshold of this concerted quest for a solution it is the part of wisdom that men in public life should be advised and we ourselves should be reminded of the chart which has guided us and which has enabled us to steer not once but many times between the menacing rocks on either hand. We cannot do better than to declare anew our fealty to those principles of action which on previous voyages have brought us safe into port and by which tonight we are delivering on the old dock a cargo rich in honor and achievement and promise.

Not in Politics

First, then, nobody concerned need have the slightest anxiety that this organization will go into politics. I shall never forget a little passage at wits which took place between one of our officers and a Senator of the United States. The Senator had what the boys call a little "bug" which he was urging upon his acquaintances at every opportunity. He proposed that the Railway Business Association take it up. "Well, now," replied our representative, "Senator, it would be delightful if we could reach out casually from time to time and put our hands to anything that may come up, but we have something in our association which you Senators don't have down here in Washington." "Is that so?" said the Senator. "You interest me. What is it that you have?" "A Constitution!" he was told. The Senator was one of that school of statesmen who sometimes chafe under restraint, and the idea appealed with special force to his sense of humor.

A Real Constitution

A Constitution we have, and one made to be observed. Copies of it are in your seats this morning. Copies of it have been in your seats at every annual meeting in the seven years of our existence as an association. Copies of it are at every chair whenever the General Executive Committee holds its quarterly or the Advisory Committee its monthly meeting. We think it is a good Constitution; but, anyhow, it is ours, and we live with it and by it and we love it.

Article V of that instrument provides as follows: "The Railway Business Association shall have no part in party politics." I believe and hope that this self-denying ordinance has not restrained the impetuosity of any members who might otherwise have done their individual duty as citizens. It is a duty, according to my own creed, for each of us to perform the citizen's function to the extent of his physical, mental and moral resources.

A Non-Partisan Movement

When it comes to association activities the situation is different. In a country where public opinion rules through political parties there are some movements the nature of which demands that men of all parties unite in them. Ours is such a movement. Nobody will find this association chained to the chariot wheels of any political party. I suppose the bosom of man knows no agony more poignant and more lingering than that which afflicts him when he has staked his all on a candidate and sees go into power the candidate whom he has gone his limit to beat.

In younger days I ran for office. I stumped for others. I had my taste of blood. No soul on the planet has a keener relish than I have for a shindy. To give and take blows; to flay the other fellow with sarcasm and be as witty as you can; to view with alarm

and hold up to scorn the character and record of an adversary—ah, but those were the halcyon days! Days, however, of office-seeking.

It is a very different thing when what you seek is measures, policy, an attitude to be assumed by government in the general interest. To the born warrior the picture of an opponent with blackened eyes, missing teeth and his arm in a sling is delightful; but—suppose he is elected! What the Railway Business Association will be found working for is that all candidates and all office-holders of all parties and all factions shall vie with one another in efforts to give us what we want. We intend to have, if we can, ambassadors at every court, detractors at none.

A Policy Well Defined

Second—The Railway Business Association will be found industriously minding its own business. Any other course would be unconstitutional. That same Article V which excludes us from politics provides that the association shall have no part "in the discussion of any public or private issues other than those directly involved in the regulation of railroads and the business interests of its members."

This does not mean that we are hermetically sealed in an air-tight compartment. Like the individual citizen, the business organization, no matter how specialized, has its obligations to others. It cannot go on year after year soliciting and receiving the co-operation of other bodies and never giving any co-operation in return. Hundreds of boards of trade and national trade organizations in these seven years have believed in our good faith, accepted our statements, concurred in our conclusions and responded to our appeals. If we never reciprocated, these gentlemen could be pardoned for regarding us at last as one of those organisms which are on the narrow line between the animal

and the vegetable; which attain maturity by adhering to some other body, and which ultimately are sold by apothecaries and spend the evening of their lives sopping up what somebody else has lugged to the bathtub.

Co-operates with Others

Our association has a lively sense of gratitude. We have tried to be a good fellow. In that spirit we joined the Chamber of Commerce of the United States and have participated in the referenda which various constituent bodies have proposed. We have appointed, at the request of the Chamber of Commerce, committees to co-operate with its special committees to investigate new subjects, or to effectuate referenda. Indeed, our members frequently sit on the special committees of the Chamber. In the past year invitations have multiplied for us to name delegates to conventions. This we have done, and to me it has been a delight to find in our membership on every occasion men known especially to me as railway equipment manufacturers, but now revealed as ardent devotees of public-spirited movements, whose personalities give our association prestige and dignity wherever they present its credentials.

Solidarity

When I say that we shall be found minding our own business I mean that we have avoided and, I am sure, shall avoid entangling ourselves in a set of miscellaneous propaganda which we initiate or in which we volunteer leadership. The job with which we started out has proved wholly adequate for the exercise of our energies and talents. More than that, we have our solidarity to conserve. Focussed on one problem in which we are all agreed, we are a united phalanx, wasting no time, strength or temper in disputes among ourselves and certain every instant of the spontaneous and

whole-hearted support of the whole membership for all that we undertake.

Careful Deliberation

Third—Nobody will catch the Railway Business Association going off at half-cock. Let me read another provision of our Constitution. Article II has this: "The officers shall cause the course of public and other discussion of regulative proposals and acts to be constantly observed and shall formulate and carry out such activities as they deem necessary, with the co-operation of the members." Please note the language. Not "an officer," not "some of the officers," but "the officers"—in other words, all the officers. Much has been said, and justly said, at Washington about deputations claiming to "represent" organizations of business men when actually some small group have drawn up resolutions and do not represent anyone but themselves. There is never any doubt when the Railway Business Association speaks that the doctrine is one which has been broadly laid down by the association itself in annual meeting. When we vote on referenda, between annual meetings, we ascertain by mail ballot the views of the membership at large.

No Delegation of Functions

It is the same when the association acts on its own behalf. One of the easiest things in the world is for a committee of subscribers to ensconce a master of language in an elegant suite of offices at a well upholstered salary and let him discharge literature of his own devising and dispatch emissaries deputized to speak for him and for you. When he and his staff have done something you don't know whether it is going to be a jubilee or an autopsy. To us another practice has appealed more strongly. If an officer of our association thinks well of some new line of thought or action he starts the necessary mechanism for finding out

how it strikes his colleagues—not one of them, or part of them, but all of them. I think I have remarked before at one of these meetings that we do not even content ourselves with obtaining a majority of the committee. We never vote at all. If one member remains unconvinced we take that as an omen and don't do it. You never have to do any crying over milk that you don't spill.

Aim to Be Truthful

Fourth—Nobody will find the Railway Business Association making mis-statements with its eyes open. That does not mean, and cannot mean, among the poor weak sons of fallen Adam, that we have never made a mistake or that we never shall make one. To do and dare is to run the risk of error. But it is within even human limitations to avoid what is known to be a misrepresentation; and I ask you to believe that Temptation, like the devil in the first epistle of St. Peter, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. There is a story of a Scotch minister who took that passage for his text. "My sermon," he said, "will be in three parts. (1) Who the devil is he? (2) Where the devil is he going? (3) What the devil is he roaring about?" That is just about the front we have had the fortitude, not to say the discretion, to put up to Temptation in the way of alleged facts and figures which might seem to bolster up a case at the moment but which we knew did not mean what they seemed to mean.

An Impartial Bureau

Some of you have heard of the Bureau of Railway Economics. That is an institution maintained at Washington by the railroads. The railway managers are proud of that bureau because among other things it keeps itself free from partisanship by an entire avoidance of argument and conclusions, and because it steadfastly re-

fuses in scrutinizing statements submitted to it to lend its countenance to any statistical demonstration which its officers regard as leaning upon a broken reed.

The Railway Business Association never embodies a computation or a statistical conclusion in a statement without first submitting it to that bureau. What is more, we never have persisted in the use of a basis which that bureau felt unable to commend as warranted by the facts.

Patient Delving

Do all of you understand what that means? Did you ever stop to reflect upon the hours and days and weeks and months which must be expended by an office like ours in working out studies which prove to be false alarms? The never-ceasing quest is for some brief and simple formula which vividly expresses the truth and which a man can carry on the tip of his tongue for purposes of missionary conversation. I invite your sympathy for the patient men of research whose highest joy is to concur with some member or friend of ours in a thesis which he would like to expound, but who nine times out of ten at the least are disappointed.

Gentlemen, you have constituted the General Executive Committee your voice. What the committee vouches for is vouched for by you. Your officers are here to see to it that you do not vouch for what is not so—at least, not if we know it.

Never Burrows

Finally, in the discussion which is about to come before the country nobody will detect the Railway Business Association burrowing. We ask thousands of persons every year to consider our statements and to help us if they can. No man ever received from anybody authorized to use our stationery a letter that could not be picked up in Broadway or LaSalle Street and

published next morning in the newspapers without throwing us off balance by the breadth of an eye-winker. Nothing is being done in your name or with your money that you can't know all about by reading the reports which reach you and which are on file in every public library in the United States. Nothing will be done out of sight, or in disguise, or side wise, or spirally. The manufacturer who enrolls his company in this association can seek his couch at eventide to slumber without tossing on our account; worry will not vex nor nightmares affright him as long as he is in good and regular standing.

Co-operation by Members

Sleep, I rejoice to add, has never hung heavy on the eyelids of our members when there was anything to be done for the association. I shall not suspend these observations without at least a brief reference to the extraordinary co-operation given to the committee during 1915. The beautiful part of it is that whenever a member company has a representative so located that he could help us if he had the standing and were willing to use it for us, it forthwith develops—first, that he has the influence, and, second, that he is hair-trigger for action. I am naturally of a morose and cynical disposition, but this experience which it has been my gracious privilege to enjoy has sweetened the sourness of a born hypochondriac, and almost converted me to the belief that virtue brings, if it is not, its own reward, and that eagerness to serve in a cause like ours is the essential quality that has given our good friends the influence and the prosperity. In and out of the General Executive Committee my own reward for whatever I may have helped to accomplish has come like bread cast upon the waters, not after many days, but these very days, in the delightful companionship with men whom I admire, respect and trust.

A Call for Suggestions

This annual business meeting differs from those of many organizations. We do not make it the occasion for debating a program of topics. The work of the Association proceeds in a continuous way throughout the year upon lines well understood. The Association as a whole performs its legislative function when it amends or leaves unamended the Constitution and adopts resolutions. The work itself is delegated to the General Executive Committee as an administrative body to deal with details and carry out the policies. For this reason the Committee avoids making arrangements for set addresses and discussions thereof.

Aside from the necessary routine of providing for continuance of this Association through this annual meeting, the purposes of the Association are sought to be accentuated and called to the nation-wide attention of the public by the dinner in the evening, when important utterances are made by distinguished guests. An essential factor in the effectiveness of the dinner is the presence here of gentlemen potential in the life of the nation. They are guests of our members, who have an obligation to entertain which in many cases begins some hours before dinner time. This business meeting, therefore, is wisely condensed into a few hours.

This, however, is the time of times for suggestions or inquiries from individual members. Speech is free. Your officers are eager for criticism or recommendation, and in fact for any expression. Those having resolutions to offer are invited to hand

them to the Secretary for reference to the Committee on Resolutions, which will be announced before recess and do its work at that time. Meanwhile, is there any subject upon which any member wishes to address the meeting?

The Association Staff

In the same terms of cordial appreciation of his faithful and valuable services that I have consecutively used from the first, regarding Mr. Frank W. Noxon, our Secretary, I repeat, with such added fervor as another year's devotion to his task would be its natural earned increment. Another star in our galaxy of efficiency deserves and hereby receives my hearty acknowledgement: Mr. P. H. Middleton, our Executive Assistant. It is high time that public avowal should be made of the seven years' service of Miss Josephine Carpenter, our Chief Clerk, without whose unflagging industry, serenity under difficulties, watchfulness, and methodical systematizing of the mass of detail with which she is charged, there would be chaos where there is always orderliness.

Gentlemen, I surrender back to you my commission as your President, thanking you, as I have on many other occasions, for the splendid support you have given me, and I feel that if I have done anything for you that has been of advantage to you, and for our great craft, I have done it for a band of men who were worth while, and who were engaged in a cause as noble and as important as that which can engage the activities and sympathies of any man.

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